

## MURAL AS A POLYLOGUE IN PUBLIC SPACE: THE COMMUNICATIVE POTENTIAL OF UKRAINIAN CONTEMPORARY MONUMENTAL ART

### *O MURAL COMO POLÍLOGO NO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO: O POTENCIAL COMUNICATIVO DA ARTE MONUMENTAL UCRANIANA CONTEMPORÂNEA*

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#### **Abstract**

The article attempts to systematically analyze the communicative potential of Ukrainian muralism. Mural is considered as a form of monumental painting that exists in public space on the border of fine art, social expression, and urban intervention. Researchers trace the origins of muralism back to cave art, but only in the 20th century did murals become a socio-cultural phenomenon that expresses social, political, cultural, environmental, and other ideas. Ukrainian mural art is an integral part of world muralism, and today Ukraine, and in particular Kyiv, is one of its centers. Muralism in recent years, and especially during the Russo-Ukrainian war, has become an important tool of cultural policy, cultural exchange, and public communication. An analysis of the communicative aspects of muralism, conducted in the article, allows highlighting its social functions and mechanisms of influence on large human communities, and investigating why this

#### **Resumo**

*O artigo procura analisar sistematicamente o potencial comunicativo do muralismo ucraniano. O mural é considerado uma forma de pintura monumental que existe no espaço público, na fronteira entre as belas-artes, a expressão social e a intervenção urbana. Os investigadores fazem remontar as origens do muralismo à arte rupestre, mas só no século XX os murais se tornaram um fenómeno sociocultural que expressa ideias sociais, políticas, culturais, ambientais e outras. A arte mural ucraniana é parte integrante do muralismo mundial, e hoje a Ucrânia, e em particular Kiev, é um dos seus centros. O muralismo, nos últimos anos, e especialmente durante a guerra russo-ucraniana, tornou-se uma importante ferramenta de política cultural, intercâmbio cultural e comunicação pública. Uma análise dos aspetos comunicativos do muralismo, realizada neste artigo, permite destacar as suas funções sociais e mecanismos*



type of monumental art represents a significant node of social interaction.

**Keywords:** Mural. Muralism. Street Art. Public Art. Communication. Community. Cultural Polylogue. Ukrainian Art.

*de influência nas grandes comunidades humanas, e investigar porque é que este tipo de arte monumental representa um nó significativo de interação social.*

**Palavras-chave:** Mural. Muralismo. Arte de Rua. Arte Pública. Comunicação. Comunidade. Polílogo Cultural. Arte Ucrainiana.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the article topic is due to the latest processes in Ukrainian mural art, which require careful analysis. Today's rapid development of muralism testifies to the demand of society for artistic understanding of the common space. A mural in the urban landscape is not only an aesthetic object, but it is an object inscribed in a political and cultural context, around which the process of communication between the city, the artist, and the community takes place (the community can be local, or can go beyond the borders of a particular city or even a country, as in the case of the Ukrainian murals created by Banksy). Murals embody public opinion in artistic form, represent symbols of national identity understandable to most viewers. At the same time, murals have both positive and negative functions, such as provoking recipients through political statements or the low artistic level of the paintings.

The Ukrainian tradition of decorating the exterior walls of buildings has an original history, different from, say, Western European, North and South American. Its heyday fell on the 1950s–1980s, when Ukraine was undergoing rapid urban development processes, and a new, neomodernist, type of city emerged with typical development of large districts. Wall images, mostly in the mosaic technique (as well as sgraffito and stained glass), were an integral part of the new architecture and at the same time an effective tool of state propaganda. They were executed only by professionals with an art education according to sketches approved by special commissions. After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, there was a pause in the process of creating wall images - because they were no longer necessary for broadcasting Soviet ideology. In those years, the monumental school also disappeared; artists who had previously created intricate mosaics were left without government orders, which were the economic basis of such practices.

Instead, graffiti art developed in free Ukraine, informal youth art communities were formed, and even festivals were held through the efforts of enthusiasts. Only in the 2010s, did new monumental images appear - no longer mosaics, but painted murals - with a new execution technique, new formal solutions, and meanings.

It should also be emphasized that Ukraine did not have a tradition of protest murals before independence - in the Soviet public space, expressions criticizing the authorities were almost impossible, even in small forms like graffiti (the word “graffiti” itself was not used in Soviet times). And this is worth remembering when assessing the path that Ukrainian muralism has taken over thirty years. A great impetus to its development was given by the Orange Revolution of the winter of 2004–2005, and then the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014 (winter protests on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv) and the war with Russia, which began in 2014 and continues.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Muralism as a current art in urban space arouses considerable interest among researchers. In addition to the purely artistic components and symbolic load of murals, scientists are studying their communicative capabilities. Back in 1995, Suzanne Lacy’s book “*Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*” [13] was published, in which the concept of a “new genre of public art” (as opposed to traditional public art, i.e., sculpture and monuments) was proposed, based on the direct interaction of the author and the viewer in interactive and socially sensitive projects that contribute to the involvement of the public in a dialogue to solve current problems. The mural in Lacy acted as one of the forms of social interaction, and the muralist - as someone who immerses himself in the problems of society and turns them into artistic expression. But public art exists at the intersection of interests of different urban communities, different identities, and can be an irritant for some, Eynat Mendelson-Shwartz and Nir Mualam emphasize in the book “*Murals and the City. A Comparative Perspective on Practices, Policies, and Regulations.*” They focused on the cultural policies of different countries and examined the problems associated with placing murals in public space [19].

Weihua Zhou’s study “*The Application and Development of Mural Art in Urban Public Environment Landscape Design*” examines the role of murals in the urban

anthropogenic landscape, emphasizing ecological, political, and social problems. According to the author, murals are the most common works of art in China. They serve not only as artistic expression, but also as a means of public communication, creating a space for social dialogue. The interaction of artists with local communities plays a significant role, as this enables creation of art that reflects the cultural specificity of the region and contributes to its identity. The author notes that modern murals can be organically combined with the architectural environment, harmoniously fit into urban spaces, that is, murals are a component of the urban ecological system. They play an important role in maintaining a balance between aesthetic expressiveness and functionality of the urban landscape [34]. However, it should be noted that the text does not address the technical aspects of preserving murals, including their sensitivity to climate change, pollution, and vandalism. In many cities, murals quickly lose their aesthetic value due to a lack of proper care and restoration - that is, a lack of communication with artists, regulators, and communities. The text also fails to address the issue of over-proliferation of murals, which can lead to visual oversaturation, disharmony with the architectural environment, and loss of authenticity in urban spaces.

Instead, the study by Aneta Pawłowska, Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek, Piotr Gryglewski, Oleg Sleptsov, Oleksandr Ivashko, Oleksandr Molodid and Marek Poczatko *“Problems of expositions and protection of Banksy’s murals in Ukraine”* analyzes the difficulties that arise during the preservation of murals, in particular, Banksy’s murals, since they are placed on damaged structures that are at risk of destruction. At the same time, the question of ownership remains unclear: do the works belong to the artists, the building owners, or the state? Experts do not have a common opinion on the further fate of the murals: to keep them in place, move them to museums, or leave them to natural destruction as evidence of the instability of wartime [25].

For our topic, the article by Saulė Petronienė and Saulutė Juzelėnienė *“Community Engagement via Mural Art to Foster a Sustainable Urban Environment”* is important, which is based on the thesis that the community is a key element of a sustainable urban environment and is a major participant in its development. The article considers the option of engaging the community in cooperation through muralism; the materials for the study were obtained during the implementation of the “Murals for Communities” project, the purpose of which was to address issues of community engagement in three cities with

social isolation: Waterford (Ireland), Heerlen (the Netherlands), and Kaunas (Lithuania) [27].

Aleksander Cywiński and Anita Karyń, using the example of one of the murals in Warsaw, also investigated how a mural involves the public in interaction and stimulates socio-cultural understanding [4]. Among the authors who emphasized the communicative functions of public art and murals in particular, we can name Katarzyna Niziołek [20], Verónica Parselis [24], Elżbieta Perzycka-Borowska, Marta Gliniecka, Kalina Kukiełko and Michał Parchimowicz [26], Graciela Trajtenberg [28], Olga Caliskan [3]. Among the Ukrainian researchers of mural art, we should mention Borys Havrylyuk [8, 9], Olexander Shylo, Olexander Ivashko [30], Oleksandra Kolisnyk and Natalya Ponomareva [10], Maria Ospischeva-Pavlyshyn (Lubynska) [15, 23], Yulia Shemeneva [26], Hanna Bitaeva [1].

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wall paintings for the purpose of communication were created by mankind in prehistoric times (rock painting, petroglyphs). But monumental painting on the exterior surface of buildings was developed at the beginning of the 20th century by the Mexican school (Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, David Siqueiros, José Orozco, etc.), whose socially charged revolutionary murals combined elements of fresco, painting, and rock art. The word “mural” itself comes from the Spanish words “*muro*” - “wall” and “*mural*” - wall painting, fresco. Interestingly, since in the Ukrainian language the word “*mur*” means a high stone or brick wall, the word “*mural*”, unused until recently, does not require translation, does not look like a foreign loanword, and is perceived as Ukrainian one.

According to Serhii Dumasenکو and Iryna Tatarova, a mural is “a direction of street art, a legal artistic painting of the exterior walls of buildings in urban space with the aim of its aestheticization” [5]. We emphasize the definition of “legal” here. Ilona Havrylash justifies the difference in the meaningfulness of the terms “mural”, “graffiti” and “street art” and points to the focus of street art and mural on communicating with citizens [7]. One of the key features of street art, which most often takes the form of graffiti, is the desire to master urban space through the unauthorized use of surfaces and

the active spread of new symbolic systems. This art often expresses protest, draws attention to social and political issues, and is also noted for the instability of its forms and bordering with vandalism. Murals, unlike illegal street art, are created with the official approval of the authorities or on their initiative, which provides for remuneration to artists and the opportunity to sign their works with their own name or a well-known pseudonym. Murals ordered in advance from the artist can be placed on the facades of buildings, fences, roofs, as well as on the walls of public institutions, such as hospitals, schools, libraries, business and shopping centers. They integrate into the urban environment and aestheticize it.

By artistic means of expression, Ukrainian murals are quite conditionally divided into graphic (lines, dots, spots, silhouettes, contrast of white and black), pictorial (accentuating the effects of light and shade and air environment), decorative (Ukrainian national ornaments, bright palette). Depending on the size, murals can be divided into three groups: mini-murals (1–7 m), middle-murals (8–19 m), and maxi-murals (20 m and more) [5]. Ukrainian murals present the whole variety of genres of modern muralism: animalistic, historical, portrait, landscape, everyday, religious, and other genres.

Mural art is by its nature a phenomenon of popular culture - in the sense that it is always oriented towards the populus: the people, the recipients, the spectators, and always enters into a dialogue. Thus, muralism is a public art. This feature of it allows paying special attention to the communicative processes that accompany the creation and further existence of murals, and proposing theses for discussion.

1. Wall decor, mostly mosaic, which remained in Ukrainian cities as a legacy from Soviet times, requires active public communication in order to preserve it. It is a vivid example of how public art depends on the political situation and can cease to be relevant, be repressed after a change of power, as happened, for example, with the murals “Milana” or “Towards Happiness” in Mariupol, which was occupied by Russia, and many other murals in the occupied territories that were destroyed by the Russians. Soviet monumental images, even without explicit Soviet symbolism, were considered of little value after 1991, destroyed or closed by the new owners of the buildings without widespread discussion and reaction from the authorities. Active public communication involving art historians (who wrote research and created electronic archives [31]), journalists, local authorities,

and activists appeared necessary to begin to realize the cultural value of such images.

2. Soviet murals carried propaganda meanings, even if they did not express it openly. For example, images of scientists glorified advanced Soviet science, athletes glorified victorious Soviet sport, and images of Ukrainians dancing a folk dance demonstrated those specific Soviet Ukrainians to whom the authorities left very little of truly folk culture and history. The emergence of a new post-Soviet muralism seemed to give rise to the claim that “the subject matter of murals is not a tool for embodying state ideology” [23]. We would like to make adjustments to this formulation, since sanctioned, legitimate public art carries an ideological charge and is within the framework of the discourse that prevails at a particular time. Thus, murals in modern Ukraine are an effective tool of cultural policy, communication with society, and the formation of a certain discourse due to the fact that they broadcast state ideology through various means, rather than conflicting with it. And here one can cite the following Kyiv murals as an example: a portrait of the Hetman of the Ukrainian State in 1918, Pavlo Skoropadsky (2015); a portrait of the historian and public figure, Chairman of the Central Council of the Ukrainian People’s Republic in 1917–1918, Mykhailo Hrushevsky (2015); “Kruty”, which honors the memory of those who fought with the Bolshevik detachments near the “Kruty” railway station in the winter of 1918 (2019).

The murals mentioned refer to the period of the Liberation Struggles (1917–1921), when Ukraine was fighting for independence from Russia. The same applies to murals that commemorate the Revolution of Dignity, the Russo-Ukrainian War, or work in general to increase the national self-awareness of Ukrainians. In general, modern Ukrainian murals, created after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, focus on the themes of death, repression, captivity, but also heroism, victory, and resilience. Let us recall the Kyiv mural depicting the captured soldier Oleksandr Matsievsky, who was shot by the Russians in 2023 while being videotaped, and his last words “Glory to Ukraine!” raised a wave of national unity. The author of this huge mural is the French artist Christian Guemi (C215). Undoubtedly, these murals are extremely emotionally charged. It is not known

how they will be perceived in a few decades, when the pain subsides, but now all recipients are experiencing strong emotions in common. One example of such emotional mural is “Russia is here never!”, which was created in Kherson, liberated from the occupiers, by Konstantin Kachanovsky. The work ridicules the pathetic slogan “Russia is here forever!”, which is repeated by the occupiers. The girl on the mural represents all the children of Ukraine who instantly became adults on February 24, 2022. By washing the coat of arms of Russia off the wall, she erases all the pain that she does not want to experience again [22]. The communicative potential of such murals is extremely high, they consolidate society.

3. In the process of developing muralism as part of the street art culture of Ukraine, there was a transition from a marginal subculture to an officially recognized, professional culture. In the mind of the late Soviet person, who was formed in the urban space, where wall mosaics were part of the state cultural policy and glorified life in the USSR, the post-Soviet graffiti of the 1990s was marginalized. They mostly spoiled the walls of houses (and this problem remains relevant today), had anonymous authors and carried incomprehensible meanings. There was no public dialogue, street art existed only in the field of subculture. It took years and the presence of high-quality, highly artistic graffiti and murals for this art to become generally recognized and generally accepted. According to Halyna Bitaeva, a mural is “a product of street art that arose from the graffiti technique in the most harmonious way possible”. Among the main characteristics of a mural, the scientist highlights a large-scale composition, the presence of an idea or illustration of a certain story, and high aesthetic value [1] - that is, something that is usually absent in graffiti.
4. Just as the monumental art of the 1950s–1980s adorned rapidly growing Ukrainian cities, so since the 2010s, new Ukrainian murals have become a tool for gentrification of areas of mass panel urban development during the reigns of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev. Works created in neglected areas and monotonous housing estates not only decorate empty walls and enliven the space, but also contribute to its revitalization, increasing the aesthetic value of the environment [33], the social level of the area, and even the cost of housing. Art

galleries, cafes, and artists' studios appear in gentrified areas. Placing murals in urban space brings contemporary art closer to the townspeople [2].

5. Apparently, the first experience of cooperation between artists and institutions in creating murals (or large-scale graffiti) in Ukraine was the festival "Kiev Muralissimo!" in 2010–2012, which was initiated by the Kyiv City Art Gallery "Lavra" and supported by the French Institute. It was an attempt to legalize rebellious, free street art, and transform it into an official project with certain frameworks. In the following years, festivals such as "Art United Us", "Odessarium", "More than Us", "Mural Social Club", "City Art", "I Love Kyiv", "Dynamic Urban Culture Kyiv", "Respublica", "Porto Franko", "Lviv WallKing", etc. were held in different cities [5][29].
6. In addition to artists, city institutions that give permission to place a mural, and its recipients (the public), an individual is important, who is a cultural manager or curator - that is, one who develops, popularizes street art, and takes care of specific projects. Among Ukrainian curators, the example of Oleg Sosnov is illustrative – he took care of the creation of some Kyiv murals and large-scale projects, was responsible for logistics (searching for an object, obtaining permission, seeking funding) and the actual artistic curatorship. The presence of such a communicator between the artist, the authorities, and residents significantly speeds up the process of creating a mural and allows avoiding many misunderstandings.
7. It is necessary to emphasize such a feature of the development of muralism in Ukraine as the active involvement of foreign artists. A significant number of Kyiv murals were created by foreigners, and this made possible the dialogue of cultures - artists with different national and cultural experiences brought their original works to the Ukrainian urban space and encouraged the townspeople to reflect. It is noteworthy that one of the most iconic, important murals of the Revolution of Dignity - a portrait of Serhiy Nigoyan, who died on the Maidan at the age of 20 - was created without a fee by the Portuguese artist Alexandre Fartu (Vhils). This symbolically loaded mural was opened in the summer of 2015 by the then President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko.

In the mid-2010s, director Geo Leros dreamed of turning Kyiv into the world capital of street art by attracting artists from different countries. He initiated one

of the first projects to create murals, received permission from the Kyiv City State Administration to decorate the walls, looked for sponsors who would pay for the artists' flights to Kyiv and materials, and communicated with the residents of the buildings [11] - in fact, here we see another example of management and curatorship. During the full-scale Russian invasion, the appearance in Kyiv of the mysterious Banksy, who created several murals, was particularly impressive. It should be noted here that the question of classifying his works as graffiti or murals is debatable. In particular, these works are closer to graffiti in terms of their small format, illegality, execution using stencils, and independence from architecture, while murals are associated with architecture [25].

Despite the fact that there are works by many foreign artists in Ukraine, it is impossible to claim that they represent a globalized, post-ethnic culture; instead, Ukrainian artists transmit an ethnic culture saturated with traditional symbolism. The dialogue of cultures in this case takes place according to a complex mechanism with cross-influences. Let us recall at least two iconic Kyiv murals "Lesya Ukrainka" on Striletska Street, 28 (dedicated to the prominent Ukrainian writer), and "Girl in Embroidered Dress" on Lesya Ukrainka Boulevard, 36-B (43 meters high!), created in 2015 by the Australian artist Guido van Helten. Another extremely important manifestation of the dialogue of cultures is the works of foreign artists outside Ukraine, but in support of Ukraine at war [6], which, unfortunately, are beyond the scope of our study.

8. The development of the culture of muralism in Ukraine allowed graffiti artists to raise their status to muralists and obtain large areas for legal expression. For example, in 2015, members of Kickit Art Studio, who formed as graffiti artists, took part in the international (together with Poland) project "Revitalization of Pidzamche", which was sponsored by the city authorities. The artists created a 10-meter mural next to the playgrounds, and this was Lviv's first experience of communication between artists, authorities, and citizens in creating a monumental painting. After that, the city authorities began to cooperate with muralists and even financed the murals.
9. Murals combine aesthetic influence and important substantive aspects. Modern street artists address social, political, and environmental topics, highlight armed

conflicts, the struggle for civil rights, popularize historical events and prominent figures - that is, using their works as a tool for public dialogue. Their works convey certain ideas and draw attention to current issues; due to their wide audience reach, they can serve as a means of propaganda or shaping public opinion. Based on these tasks, murals are mostly created realistically, as opposed to graffiti, which is often abstract or fantasy-font. It is the narrative nature of murals that makes it possible for the general public to read their meanings. But there is also experience in creating abstract murals in Ukraine. For example, in the summer of 2022 in Vinnytsia, artist Maksym Kilderov presented an abstract mural (close to the style of graffiti) in the arch of a house on Soborna Street. The only thing that can be read on the walls is the many-repeated words “Nova Kakhovka” (the author’s occupied city, from which he managed to leave), as well as the serial number of the Russian missile that caused the destruction and death of the city’s residents, written in one place, which has already been declared Russian. To enhance the communicative aspect of the mural, which is intended to remind those who remained under occupation, the author added interactive elements.

10. The war gave a powerful impetus to the nation-building movement and cultural decolonization, that is, the separation of Ukrainian culture from Russian and the creation of an original Ukrainian cultural product (and this, we note, is also state cultural policy). In this context, murals that reflect Ukrainian landscapes, Ukrainian human types, or are enriched with elements of traditional Ukrainian folk art have acquired a new meaning. The murals of Oleksiy Bordusov (AEC *Interesni Kazki*) and Volodymyr Manzhos (*Waone Interesni Kazki*) are typical examples. Despite the general multicultural nature of their work, the artists retain features associated with Ukrainian art in their works. For example, the mural “Time of Changes” figuratively interprets the war in Ukraine: a hexagonal Cossack with a winged angel fights against a manipulative serpent that has enveloped the earth [8].

Some phenomena of artistic culture were reinterpreted during the war, for example, the work of Maria Prymachenko, a naive artist of the Soviet era. Now Maria Prymachenko’s fantastic beasts (as well as other motifs of her works) are a clear symbol of “Ukrainianness”, understood by both the general public of

Ukrainians and the international community. Murals based on the artist's works can be found in Kyiv (in particular, on the walls of the "Okhmatdyt" hospital), Lutsk, Svitlovodsk.

11. A mural that does not meet the needs of the community, enters into a confrontation with public opinion, can be destroyed. This happened in Kyiv in January 2025 with a mural on which an unknown author depicted Andriy Yermak, head of the President's Office. Literally on the same day, after significant public publicity and loud criticism, the mural was covered with white paint, again by unknown people. Journalists did not receive any comments from the authorities.
12. There are also examples of the destruction of murals in Kyiv that were not authorized by local authorities. For example, in October 2024, the mural "Obriy" was destroyed on Vvedenska Street, 6. The mural depicted the head of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) of the Ministry of Defense, Kirill Budanov, in a naive style, with a dedication to the living and fallen fighters of the GUR. Despite the resonant topic and the fact that it is the work of the famous street artists the Feldman sisters, the Kyiv authorities gave the order to paint over the mural, since it was applied to the wall of a building that is a monument of local architectural significance without permission. The artists, on the other hand, claimed that they had coordinated the work with the residents of the building. It should be noted that literally a month earlier in the same area, on Vvedenska Street, at 51 Nyzhniy Val, an authorized mural by the aforementioned Volodymyr Manzhos (Waone) appeared, "The Wise One Reigns Over the Stars", also dedicated to the GUR fighters.
13. Another reason for the destruction of murals is their lack of artistic quality (unfortunately, there are already quite a few such murals in Ukraine). In September 2023, after the appearance of a mural of low artistic quality by Eugenia Fullen on an old Kyiv house (1903) on Sichovykh Striltsiv Street, 31, residents called the police to prevent the completion of the work. It should be noted that the author received permission from the district authorities and the responsible department of the Kyiv City State Administration, and also previously informed the residents of the house about the creation of the mural and encouraged dialogue, but no one contacted her. When the work began, local youth harassed the author

and left rude inscriptions on the wall - this is an example of negative communication. Residents outraged by the poor-quality mural were supported by Kyiv City Council member Yevheniy Kuleba (who has long been involved in the creation of public spaces and murals). The local community initiated an electronic petition, which demanded that the Kyiv authorities facilitate a broad public discussion of the murals and develop a mechanism for their approval. The result of the appeal of Kyiv residents and a six-month bureaucratic procedure was the Procedure for Applying Monumental Paintings (Murals) in Kyiv, which was approved by the Kyiv City Council. Among its points, there are the following: advertising images are prohibited; murals dedicated to a significant event or a person who has passed away are created no earlier than a year after the event or the person's death; as a rule, only one mural is created within the city limits in memory of an event or person; if the event or person has already been immortalized in another way, a mural is usually not created. The commission, which is to approve the sketches and locations of monumental murals, includes representatives of the city authorities and specialists in the fields of art history, local history, urban studies, architecture and cultural studies, whose candidacies are submitted by the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine. Thus, in Kyiv, for the first time in Ukraine, the process of placing murals in urban space was institutionalized and bureaucratized, and communication around the creation of a mural was regulated at the level of city legislation.

14. Despite this experience - the positive and negative consequences of which will be clear in the future - it should be recognized that communication with local communities around the creation of murals has not yet been developed in Ukraine, there is no practice of broad discussion. One of the largest surveys on the best [16] and worst [17] murals in Kyiv, involving about 4,000 participants, was conducted not at the design stage, but ex post facto and at the initiative of the media, not the city authorities. The mechanism how active community involvement can be implemented is revealed in the already mentioned study by Saulė Petronienė and Saulutė Juzelėnienė using the example of three European cities. There, community involvement in the creation of murals began with seminars, during which citizens were encouraged to participate in joint actions to improve the urban environment

and strengthen the communities themselves. In total, 54 seminars were organized in the three partner cities and 18 murals were created. The entire community engagement process was a well-coordinated structure of events, where each stage and each participant played a significant role. The results of the study showed that citizen engagement workshops were a successful tool for uniting and strengthening the community. Thus, it is proven that community members can be active participants in social communication and developers of both a sustainable community and a sustainable urban environment [27].

#### 4 CONCLUSION

We believe that an important criterion for evaluating murals is their communicative function in the urban space: high or low, positive or negative. Street art is not just an aesthetic addition to architecture, but a way of interacting between the artist, the city (authorities), citizens, and other participants in the process. That is why, to better convey meaning, murals are usually realistic, aesthetic and have a symbolic component that reflects religious, social, environmental, or political aspects (images of animals, natural motifs, historical figures are often used). Having studied the communication around Ukrainian murals on specific examples, we have come to certain conclusions.

First, murals shape the identity of a city, reflect the moods of its citizens and citizens of the state, the dominant cultural discourse, or the spirit of the era. When we contemplate images on the facades of buildings - often gigantic, and size also matters for communication - that remind us of prominent personalities, important historical events, or national traditions, they become part of collective memory. For example, murals with portraits of prominent people shape the Ukrainian historical and cultural discourse. The significance of many figures was revealed only after Ukraine gained independence (after all, during Soviet times they were forgotten or discredited), and was entrenched in public consciousness, including thanks to murals.

Secondly, murals represent a channel for expressing public opinion. Many modern street art works are devoted to social and political topics. They draw public attention to current problems, provoke discussion and encourage changes in public opinion. This

component of murals has become especially relevant after the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine.

Thirdly, murals are elements of urban polylogue. They can speak a universal language of symbols, be created as a reaction to significant events, or, conversely, contain messages understandable only to local residents, transmit local meanings, can be made with any materials on any scale, but communication always takes place around them. Most often, the term “dialogue” is used in relation to murals - meaning communication between the author and the viewer and intercultural interaction. We propose to use the term “polylogue”, since this communication has many participants and many vectors. In the examples we have given, artists, curators, city authorities, businesses (sponsors), customers (for example, the management of the school on whose wall the mural will be), relatives of the person depicted (in the case of immortalizing a fallen soldier or public figure), residents of a house, district or entire city, that is, communities of various sizes enter in communication. Communication can be friendly or tense, sometimes conflicting, murals can cause negative reactions. Therefore, the concept of “dialogue” does not describe the full complexity of these communications.

Among the positive functions of murals, we note: a) aestheticization of urban space; b) creation of visual accents in urban development; c) communication with the community on socially significant topics (politics, history, ecology, national identity, etc.); d) creation of identification markers indicating national and cultural identity; e) informing about important events and social movements; e) democratization of art, which becomes accessible to a large number of people; f) interactivity, i.e., interaction between the artist and the audience, which makes the artist famous (in contrast to the anonymity of graffiti artists).

We consider negative manifestations to be insufficiently understood mechanisms of communication between artists, authorities, and citizens, which leads, for example, to the appearance of murals in inappropriate places, with low artistic qualities and unclear content. In turn, this affects the attitude of the population towards the art of murals in general, undermining its significance as an object of social communication. An extreme case of disagreement with an artistic expression or with the forces behind this expression may be the destruction of a mural. Modern Ukrainian researchers of murals mostly emphasize positive manifestations, paying particular attention to the semantics and

symbolism of murals, execution techniques, political and national-cultural meanings of muralism, but negative manifestations are poorly covered - they often remain in the media and social networks, where public discussions take place around certain murals.

Therefore, we believe that murals are an important element of modern urban space, which performs not only aesthetic, but also socio-cultural, communicative, and identification functions. They contribute to the formation of collective memory, reflecting historical events, social problems and cultural features of regions. Communication around the creation of murals, if well-organized, serves to strengthen communities, helps to create a comfortable environment in the city, and ultimately works in favor of the concept of sustainable urban development.

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All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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